

*Prosodion* Written in Bone: An Inscribed Bone Plaque from the Berezan Island

The small bone plaque from the Berezan Island (550-525 or late 6<sup>th</sup>-early-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), identified as the shin bone of a bull or a horse with the approximate length of 4.8 cm and thickness of 0.3 cm, was first published in 1986 by A. S. Rusjaeva. Since then it became one of the most difficult and challenging epigraphic riddles we have inherited from the Northern Black Sea region. The intricate graffiti on both sides of the trapezoidal bone fragment have been interpreted either as sacred, magical, or as a writing exercise, which leaves us with a number of unanswered questions. The most controversial, the most confusing, and given the least attention by scholars is the record on the bone plaque's reverse side:

**EBANBOYAIA A A A**  
**A A   A A A   A   A A A**  
**ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΣ ΒΟΡΕΩ**

In the current study the author applies and introduces a different approach to analyse and interpret the inscriptions, arguing that the text consists of three parts connected in meaning, one of which represents an authentic record of ancient Greek vocal notation with *ephymnion*. To support the hypothesis, the author presents analogous musical documents with the same structure, including rare Greek vase depictions that present possible musical notation from the early-5<sup>th</sup> century. Such evidence will undoubtedly shed more light on a number of controversial issues related to the origin, the evolution, and the use of Greek notation systems, as well as to the composing, recording and performing of music during the Archaic age.

Arranged in a coherent order, the structure of the text inscribed on both sides of the Berezan bone plaque consists of three parts and includes 18 lines in total. The two lines of letters quoted above are identified as vocal musical notation. The full text includes the following compositional

elements:

**1-2 Vocal musical notation.**

**3-8 Allusions to mythical narratives of Apollo:**

*3 Invocation (epiklesis)*

**4-8 Praise (eulogia):**

*4 Allusions to the story of god's birth*

**5-8 Allusions to narratives of Apollo's great and beneficial deeds:**

*5 Apollo (Archegetes Oikistes Patroos)*

*6-7 Apollo Toxophoros and Ietros*

*8 Apollo Delphinios*

**9-18 Short sections:**

*9-11 Blessing/prayer (litaneia)*

12 ?

**13-15 Dedication.**

**16-17 Refrain-singing (ephymnion).**

**18 Sacred topography (location of the altar).**

These compositional elements, as well as the early dating justify to identify the document as *prosodion*. The original composition reveals the 'scenario' of one of the famous ancient festive religious processions associated with the cult of Apollo Delphinios, parallels of which can be found among dozens of ancient authors such as Athenaios, Apollonios of Rhodes and Clement of Alexandria. Berezan was founded by settlers from Miletos not far from the future famous colony Olbia in the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Just like in the metropolis, the cult of Apollo was widespread along with the traditional cult music, which played a major role in all religious festivals.

As part of the mandatory ritual performances, processional songs were studied by boys and girls from an early age. We may assume that the *prosodion* of Berezan was one of the traditional songs at the cult center of Didyma and was intended for performance in the official cult of Apollo in both Miletos and its colony Berezan-Olbia. It is highly likely that the processional song was sung by the citizens during the main festival of Apollo (the *Conqueror over the North wind*) in the month Taureon.

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